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# Project C.O.R.E.: Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences

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## **PROJECT C.O.R.E: COACHING OPPORTUNITIES WITH REAL EXPERIENCES**

### **TEAM MEMBERS**

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Lee Franco, Associate Chair and Associate Professor, Kinesiology and Health Sciences, College of Humanities and Sciences

Melissa Hopkins, Virginia Treatment Center for Children Finance and Business Manager, Psychiatry, School of Medicine

Marcus Messner, Associate Director and Associate Professor, Robertson School of Media and Culture, College of Humanities and Sciences

Cheryl Slokker, Marketing and Communications Manager, School of Business Dean's Office

Alison Ullman, Physician, Pediatrics, VCU Health System

Jon Waybright, Instructor, Religious Studies, College of Humanities and Sciences

*Project Sponsor: Erin Burke Brown, Director of ASPIRE*

### **PROJECT ABSTRACT**

Retention and graduation rates of VCU men of color (MOC) is significantly lower than white men and women of color. Due to demonstrated significant attrition occurring after the sophomore year, Project C.O.R.E. (Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences) is proposed as a sophomore-focused program that builds upon an existing freshman course on professional development for MOC. While the first-year course introduces students to a VCU support network, Project C.O.R.E. aims to increase university retention by expanding the student support network to members of the local community. Students are paired with community coaches, predominantly VCU alumni, to enhance their career and life-skills development. This program provides continued community, guidance, and support to encourage MOC to continue on the path to graduation.

### **QUEST CONNECTIONS**

This team project cuts across two strategic plans as the university phases out its existing plan and moves forward into its new plan. Project C.O.R.E. aligns with Themes I of both the Quest for Distinction and Quest 2025 by retaining talented and diverse students, graduating them at higher rates, and preparing them to serve as leaders in Central Virginia and beyond.

Quest for Distinction	Quest 2025: Together We Transform
<p><b>Theme I:</b> Become a leader among national research universities in providing all students with high-quality learning/living experiences focused on inquiry, discovery and innovation in a global environment</p> <p><b>Goal 1:</b> Recruit and retain talented and diverse students who will graduate at a higher rate than our Quest peers and serve as leaders in a well-educated workforce</p> <p><b>Strategy B:</b> Enhancing undergraduate degree progression</p>	<p><b>Theme I:</b> Student Success – Transform the lives of our distinctive and diverse student population through a university culture that supports every student’s success through inquiry, discovery, innovation, civic engagement, and creative expression.</p> <p><b>Goal I.3:</b> Enhance the university culture supporting student success, including improved retention and graduation rates</p> <p><b>Key Strategy:</b> Advance a university wide culture focused on the success of our students</p>

Of the fall 2015 cohort, only 59.8% of MOC were retained after their sophomore year compared to 70.3% of white men and 72.9% of women of color. Of the fall 2011 cohort, only 50.8% of MOC graduated in six years compared to 57.8% white men and 66.2% of women of color.<sup>1</sup> We expect that sophomore MOC who participate in Project C.O.R.E. will have greater engagement with the university and the community as they connect with community leaders, potentially progressing into a more long-term mentoring relationship in the process. By connecting the students with community leaders to develop them as future leaders and to connect them to the region, this project also has the potential to contribute to Themes III of both the Quest for Distinction and Quest 2025. In this experiential learning program, students will take what they learn in the classroom to the community and gain critical real-life experience. In the long term, Project C.O.R.E. has the potential not only to affect the lives and careers of our students, but also the future of the region as these students grow to become its next generation of leaders. The project also has the potential to align closely with Theme IV of Quest 2025 by creating a culture of appreciation and respect for MOC and building a positive climate for their successful college careers. In the long term, the project can also contribute to Theme II of Quest 2025 by positioning VCU as a national leader in increasing graduation rates of MOC.

## PROJECT GOALS

Project C.O.R.E. was developed in response to a critical evaluation of resources for MOC based on multiple meetings with leaders and stakeholders at VCU. Project C.O.R.E. will focus on MOC, who have one of the lowest VCU retention and graduation rates at VCU. By offering a course for sophomore MOC dedicated to improving students’ on- and off-campus community, Project C.O.R.E. aims to fulfill the following goals:

1. Increase the success of MOC at VCU, which will be measured by an increase in retention and graduation.
2. Prepare MOC to serve as leaders in Central Virginia and beyond through their community with each other and their relationships with their Project C.O.R.E. coaches.

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<sup>1</sup> Virginia Commonwealth University, Office of Planning and Decision Support. Available at: <https://opds.vcu.edu/eaar/insights/>

3. Develop a coaching program model to improve the academic learning environment for MOC by engaging with local VCU alumni.
4. Identify permanent funding for program.

## **PROJECT STRATEGIES**

To complete this project, the team utilized forums and meetings with university leaders and stakeholders<sup>2</sup> as well as enrollment data from the Office of Planning and Decision Support. Through these efforts, the team discovered an unmet opportunity to target underrepresented students that this project can fulfill. A partnership was formed with Carlton Goode, a nationally-renowned expert on advising and mentoring MOC, who teaches a one-credit, MOC-focused class “Dynamic Principles for Professional Development: Men of Color” through the Office of Undergraduate Academic Advising. Goode, who shared the team’s vision, assisted in creating a synergistic solution for Project C.O.R.E.

## **ACTION STEPS**

In order to develop Project C.O.R.E., the following action items were taken by the team:

- Reviewed VCU retention and graduation data
- Identified university leaders and organized meetings with the team
- Held a “summit” with stakeholders
- Identified need for dedicated coaching program for MOC student population
- Met with Carlton Goode and discussed expansion of his existing MOC program
- Developed action items for partnership with Carlton Goode
- Developed implementation plan for Project C.O.R.E. and developed objectives for new one-credit UNIV 391 Topics course “Project C.O.R.E.”

Action items required for the implementation of Project C.O.R.E:

- Develop a course syllabus for UNIV 391 that aligns with UNIV 291.
- Recruit students from UNIV 291 course for a “Part II” course that is available during their sophomore year.
- Work with Development and Alumni Relations and other stakeholders to identify potential coaches from the alumni database.
- Develop resources for training the coaches.
- Advocate for and secure funding.
- Guide organization of five meetings between coaches and students.
- Plan and organize five coaching sessions on professionalism and leadership for each class of UNIV 391 students.
- Organize student and coach reporting processes.
- Development assessment and evaluation measures.

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<sup>2</sup> University leaders and stakeholders included the following: Amy Gray Beck, Executive Director of Alumni Outreach and Engagement, Alumni Relations; McKenna Brown, Executive Director, Global Education Office; Charles Klink, Senior Vice Provost for Student Affairs; Kim Hanneman, Assistant Director, Career and Industry Advising, VCU Career Services; James Mays, Associate Dean for Undergraduate Academic Affairs, College of Humanities and Sciences; Lynn Pelco, Associate Vice Provost for Community Engagement; Reuban Rodriguez, Associate Vice Provost for Student Affairs and Dean of Students; Rebecca Halligan, Assistant Director of VCU Lead; and Maggie Tolan, Interim Senior Associate Vice Provost for Student Success.

## OUTCOMES

The desired outcome is the successful implementation of Project C.O.R.E. by university stakeholders to achieve a sense of community among MOC through the new UNIV 391 Topics course “Project C.O.R.E.” and improve retention and graduation rates for MOC at VOC. The project will also identify and discuss with students important issues related to their college success and the transition into the professional workforce. Connecting MOC students to community leader enhances their opportunities for professional development and reassures their potential to become future leaders with a lasting impact in the region.

## SUSTAINABILITY

Project C.O.R.E. will be embedded in the sophomore course UNIV 391 “Project C.O.R.E.” that builds upon Goode’s course “Dynamic Principles for Professional Development: MOC.” The Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) in the Division of Student Affairs is an ideal location within which to situate Project C.O.R.E. A graduate student coordinator, supervised by an administrator, would be a suitable combination to provide a supportive and robust experience for the students and the coaches. Graduate students in the Master of Counselor Education program, or an equivalent program, would be afforded the opportunity to utilize and develop their counseling skills while also earning practicum and internship hours.

## FINANCING AND RESOURCES

In order to sustain Project C.O.R.E., a dedicated budget should be established to cover costs for the components of two UNIV 391 class sections, as well as the scheduled coaching events and activities. If OMSA is running the program, which itself is housed in the Division of Student Affairs (DSA), funding could either be provided by DSA or through grants for which OMSA would apply. Should the DSA not be able to fully fund this program, other stakeholders could be approached to share the costs. Stakeholders are mentioned in the recommendations section below. The estimated annual cost for 42 students in two class sections is \$37,400, and is detailed below.

	Item Description	Cost
<b>Classes</b>	Mixer	\$600
	Speakers’ lunches	\$1,200
	Study session and roundtable discussion snacks	\$600
	Formal interview luncheon	\$1,200
	Graduate student	\$25,000
<b>Coaching</b>	Department of Alumni Relations (DAR) platform for coach selection process	\$5,000
	Lunches/dinners - 3 per semester, to include students and coaches	\$3,800
<b>Total</b>		\$37,400

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The team considers the key stakeholders of Project C.O.R.E to be the Division of Student Affairs and its Office of Multicultural Student Affairs, the VCU Division of Alumni Relations, and the Office of Community Engagement. The following key recommendations for the overall future growth and success of the program were identified:

- 1) Assessment and evaluation of the program is strongly recommended in order to provide support for its growth
- 2) If the project proves to be successful in retaining MOC into their junior year at higher rates than MOC who do not take this course, it is recommended that the program be expanded with components for juniors and seniors in order to further support them through graduation
- 3) It is recommended that permanent funding be secured to ensure growth and sustainability, as well as incentivize student and community participants
- 4) Measures need to be taken to strengthen ties between the program and existing community groups to increase the potential pool of coaching participants.

## **FINAL PITCH**

Enrollment data at VCU show that men of color have lower retention and graduation rates within the university than other populations. Project C.O.R.E will provide men of color at VCU with significant support on their path towards graduation. The "Project C.O.R.E." course will connect students to community leaders who are VCU alumni. This coaching relationship will not only enhance their college experience but will also help them envision their current and future successes. Long term, the project will also help to improve their career goals. Implementing Project C.O.R.E. will benefit VCU by improving retention and graduation rates for men of color and establish a greater connection to the university, likely increasing their alumni participation.



**Elizabeth Bambacus**, Strategic Enrollment Management

**Lee Franco**, Kinesiology and Health Sciences

**Melissa Hopkins**, School of Medicine

**Marcus Messner**, Robertson School of Media & Culture

**Cheryl Slokker**, School of Business

**Ali Ullman**, Children's Hospital of Richmond at VCU

**Jon Waybright**, School of World Studies

## The Hibbsters

"Hey Google"



How Diverse is Virginia Commonwealth University?



## #1 Search Result on Google:

Virginia Commonwealth University is ranked **#185** in ethnic diversity nationwide with a student body composition that is far above the national average.

VCU Ethnic Diversity Rank (185 out of 2,718)

less diverse more diverse

## VCU Fall 2017 Enrollment Statistics

Sophomore-focused program

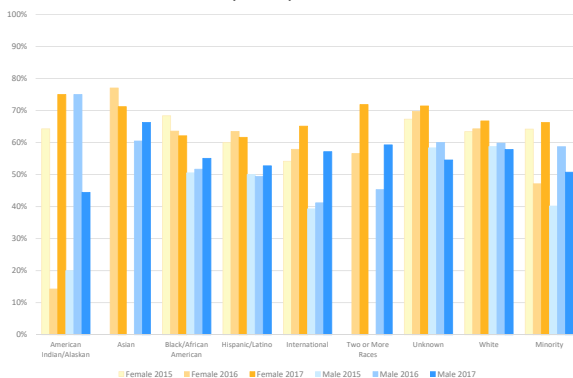
- 5,300 (17.08%) Black/African American Students\*
- 2,212 (7.57%) Hispanic/Latino Students

\*Largest percentage of underrepresented minority population at VCU



## Graduation Data

6 Year Graduation Rate in 2015-2017  
by Ethnicity and Gender



## Project C.O.R.E.

*Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!*



## Our Vision

**Project C.O.R.E.** will take its place alongside the wellspring of university-wide experiential learning initiatives that provide students with opportunities in the surrounding Richmond area.

**Project C.O.R.E.** provides avenues for community leaders and alumni to interact, impact, and support minority VCU students along their academic journey and will create a network of relationships between VCU and the Richmond community that will undoubtedly benefit our students.





# Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



## Our Journey

- Reviewed VCU retention and graduation data
- Developed idea for a coaching program
- Identified university leaders and organized meetings
- Held a summit with VCU stakeholders
- Identified need for dedicated coaching program for MOC student population
- Developed Project C.O.R.E.



# Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



- Sophomore-focused program
  - Builds upon an existing freshman course on professional development "Dynamic Principles for Professional Development: Men of Color"
- Increases university retention
  - Expands student support network to members of the local community
- Path towards graduation
  - Program provides continued community, guidance, and support

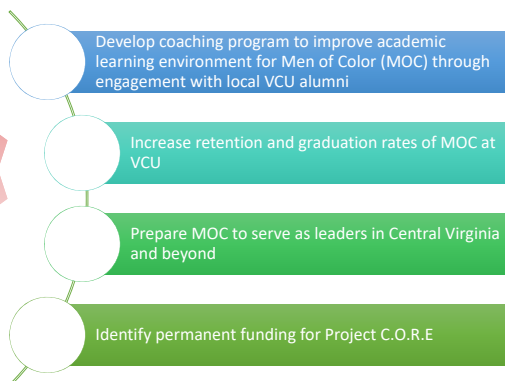


# Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



## Project Goals

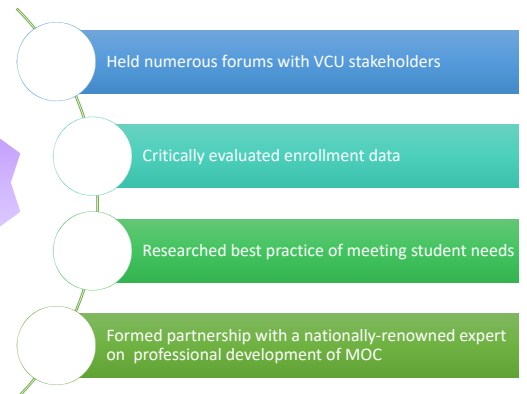


# Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



## Project Strategies



# Project C.O.R.E.



## Existing VCU Initiative

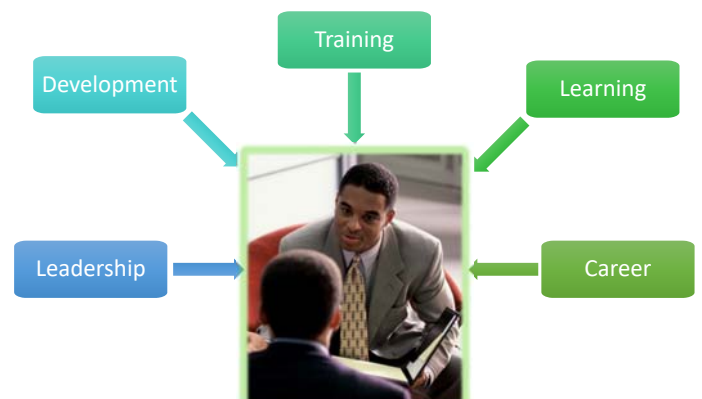
UNIV 291:  
Dynamic Principles  
for Professional  
Development:  
Men of Color

Carlton Goode  
Nationally-renowned  
expert on advising  
and mentoring MOC

Photo Credit: <https://inclusive.vcu.edu/diversity-awards/pacme/>

# Project C.O.R.E.

## Anticipated Student Outcomes



## The integrated themes of Quest 2025: Together We Transform



## NATIONAL LEADERSHIP

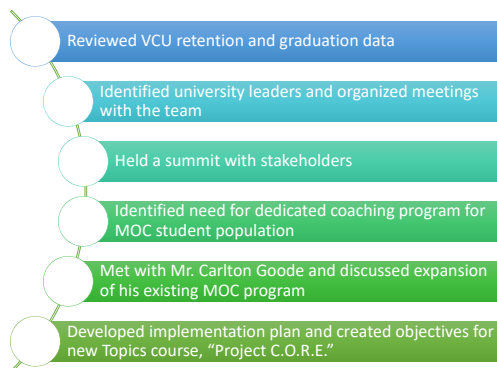


## Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



### Action Steps Taken

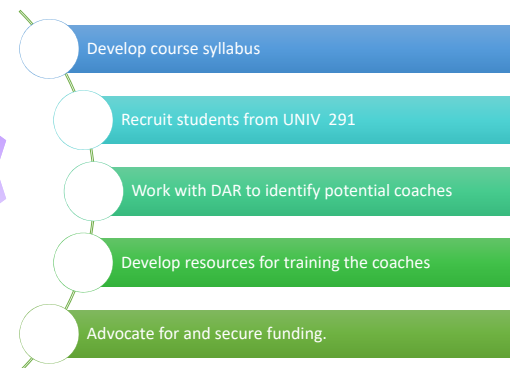


## Project C.O.R.E.

Coaching Opportunities with Real Experiences!



### Next Steps



## Project C.O.R.E. How it Works...

- Guide organization of five meetings between coaches and students.
- Plan and organize five coaching sessions on professionalism and leadership for each class of UNIV 391 students.
- Organize student and coach reporting processes.
- Development assessment and evaluation measures.



## Project C.O.R.E. Outcomes

- Develop sense of community among MOC through new UNIV 391 Topics course "Project C.O.R.E."
- Establish an outlet to identify and discuss important issues related to college success and the transition into the professional workforce
- Enhance professional development of MOC by connecting them to community leaders
- Improve retention and graduation rates for MOC
- Develop future leaders who have a lasting impact in the region



## Project C.O.R.E. *Finances and Resources*



For 42 students, 2 class sections

	Item Description	Cost
Classes	Mixer	\$600
	Speakers' lunches	\$1,200
	Study session and roundtable discussion snacks	\$600
	Formal interview luncheon	\$1,200
	Graduate student	\$25,000
	Department of Alumni Relations (DAR) platform for coach selection process	\$5,000
Coaching	Lunches/dinners - 3 per semester, to include students and coaches	\$3,800
Total	Total	\$37,400



## Project C.O.R.E. *Finances and Resources*



Growth and Success of the Program will be dependent on

- Assessment and evaluation of program to provide support for growth
- Extension of program
  - Develop junior and senior year versions of the course
- Secure permanent resourcing to ensure sustainability and incentivize student/community participants
- Strengthen ties with community groups to increase pool of coaching participants



## Project C.O.R.E. *Sustainability*



- Project C.O.R.E. will be embedded in the sophomore course UNIV 391 "Project C.O.R.E."
  - Building upon UNIV 291 "Dynamic Principles for Professional Development: MOC"
- Project C.O.R.E. could be housed in the Office of Multicultural Student Affairs (OMSA) in the Division of Student Affairs
- Designated employee manages the program
  - Graduate student should coordinate the program under supervised of an administrator



## Project C.O.R.E. *Recommendations*



### Proposed Stakeholders



## Project C.O.R.E. *Let's get started!*



- Work must be done to retain and increase degree completion among MOC at VCU
- Project C.O.R.E will provide MOC support on their path towards graduation
- Connecting students to community leaders who are VCU alumni will
  - enhance their college experience
  - role model current and future successes



## Project C.O.R.E. *Let's get started!*



Benefits for VCU:

1. Improve retention and graduation rates
2. MOC alumni are likely to feel a greater sense of connection to VCU resulting in greater engagement as alumni
3. Re-engage alumni as coaches, encouraging additional future contributions

